

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of April 27, 2021

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Jon Ignatowski (Economic Development Director), Karina Dailey (Ecological Restoration Coordinator, Vermont Natural Resources Council), Michael Hildenbrand P.E. (DuBois & King), Don Rhoades (Friends of Northfield Dog Park), Brittany Benoit (Friends of Northfield Dog Park), Jen Jackson (Friends of Northfield Dog Park), Megan McCord (Friends of Northfield Dog Park), Bonnie Donahue (Dog River Park Committee & Northfield Common Connections), Simon Pearish (Dog River Park Committee), Lydia Petty (Northfield Common Connections), Deb Zuaro (Conservation Commission), Cassie Morse (Northfield Farmers Market), Kaitlyn Keating (NCDN), Nigel Tibbles, Mark Diego, and Carolyn Stevens (NCDN).

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Amy Robertson was scheduled under "Public Participation" to discuss backroads gravel concerns but was not present.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED)

- a. Karina Dailey, Vermont Natural Resources Council: Cross Brothers Dam Removal.** Ms. Dailey said Brian Fitzgerald used to address the Select Board members on this matter but he has retired since his last appearance. Ms. Dailey now is taking the lead on this project. The engineering firm DuBois & King was hired as project engineers and their plans are thirty percent (30%) complete. Ms. Dailey would like the Select Board's authorization to proceed towards final project design. With the municipality's written support, she has applied for a FEMA grant that would cover about twenty-five percent (25%) of the total project costs. The balance would be covered by additional state, federal, and private funds. The dam removal would restore the river's natural flow, provide potential flood mitigation, reestablish normal habitat migration, improve water quality, create educational opportunities, and provide better riverside access for recreational purposes. Ms. Dailey explained that removing the dam would greatly reduce the possibility of Water Street flooding during a major storm event. The water quality of the river would improve with the removal of collected silt now behind the dam while also reducing the possibility of stormwater overflow into the Dog River. The public outreach during the later phases of the project would include educating residents on the many benefits to the community when dilapidated dams are removed. The area near the Cross Brother Dam currently is used for some recreation purposes and this project will create greater access.

Michael Hildenbrand is the DuBois & King engineer for this project and he displayed the site plans for this project. The benefits to the Dog River from this dam removal would stretch from the riverbend just east of the dam westward almost to the Wall Street Bridge area. This project would restore the natural contours of the stream. In addition, greater water storage capacity would lower flooding risks and the improved river flow would allow trout and other fish to travel more freely northward on the Dog River. The riverbed will be graded down to create a more consistent level in the project area. An access road starting just north of the Main Street Bridge would be installed to allow equipment to be transported to the dam location. This road would not interfere with the stream and, if the Select Board members wish, could be left behind to provide post-project public access to the riverside for swimming, fishing, etc. After the dam's removal, the river depth should be between three and four feet (3'-4'). Since the access road would be adjacent to the Dollar General building, some outreach to the business will be needed. There also will need to be some coordination with the Northfield Sewer Department as there are sewerlines in the area that shouldn't be disrupted. Chair Maxwell then opened to the floor to questions from Select Board members.

Board member Goodrich asked how long the dam removal process would take. Mr. Hildenbrand thought that depended on how much riverbed material and dam concrete is removed and where it is transported. He estimated between sixty (60) and ninety (90) days. Board member Goodrich asked if there would be any direct cost to the municipality. Ms. Dailey said there would not. However, the chance of a successful FEMA grant might be improved with evidence of local support that might include in-kind services or some local funding. This will be a very expensive project so grants might not cover all possible expenses. Board member Stevens asked if DuBois & King have determined where all the riverbed material would go or if it is still looking at options. Mr. Hildenbrand spoke to Manager Schulz on this and it was thought the Northfield Falls gravel pit was one possibility. Manager Schulz confirmed it is possible the riverbed material could be repurposed for use on the backroads or for other uses. This is only a preliminary thought as the suitability of the material is uncertain. Ms. Dailey said the contractor may want to retain the material if the municipality doesn't want it. She felt the sediment removed could become valuable road material. Mr. Hildenbrand said the material is not too fine so it could be used for a number of practical purposes.

Board member Morse was impressed with the presentation and he looks forward to the project happening. He noted that the nearby Main Street Bridge is scheduled for replacement in 2025 and asked if that would have any impact on the dam removal process. Ms. Dailey has been in contact with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) about this and said the dam removal probably would take place a year or two before the bridge replacement. She added that the current design of the replacement bridge doesn't have all the beam supports of the current structure and this should reduce future buildup of river silt and other debris. Ms. Dailey will keep in contact with VTrans as both projects proceed. Board member Morse asked if there would be any blasting in the project area. Ms. Dailey said there would not as this is no longer allowed. Chair Maxwell asked about the total cost of the dam removal process. Mr. Hildenbrand said if the FEMA grant is successful and additional flood mitigation work has to be performed, the cost would be about \$930,000. A more scaled back project would cost about \$540,000. Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Dailey and Mr. Hildenbrand for the project update and he looks forward to additional reports in the future. Ms. Dailey said another presentation would be scheduled as the project plans develop.

- b. Don Rhoades, Friends of Northfield Dog Park: Dog Park Plan, Bylaws, etc.**
- Mr. Rhoades said he posted to Front Porch Forum in early October 2020 to see if there was any public interest in creating a dog park in Northfield. The response was very positive and the next month Mr. Rhoades and other interested parties formed "Friends of Northfield Dog River Park" to work out such logistics as the best location for the park, its design, etc. More recently Mr. Rhoades has been working with Manager Schulz and Economic Development Director Jon Ignatowski on this possibility as he would like the park to be both well-designed and well-run. Mr. Rhoades believes having a dog park in Northfield would provide economic benefits to the community by encouraging pet owners to move to Northfield while also serving as an important social center. It also would provide good exercise for local dogs. Northfield owns a lot of parcels in town and the committee members looked at several before focusing on the FEMA-buyout property located on Water Street just south of the Union Street intersection. A petition movement has indicated broad support for this proposal and Norwich University (NU) students would be asked to design the facility as part of a class project. There is a \$15,000 estimate to cover the expense of fencing, gates, etc. and Mr. Rhoades and his committee have reached an agreement with Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) to share its non-profit organization designation for fundraising purposes. Mr. Rhoades realizes future maintenance of the facility is an important consideration so he has reached out to the operators of the dog park in Waterbury regarding the logistics of dog waste removal, etc. Strict rules have been developed governing the behavior of those using the dog parks (both humans and canines) that would be posted outside the facility.

Mr. Rhoades noted committee member Brittany Benoir has suggested the sale and installation of memorial plaques for deceased pets at the park as one way to raise funds. Committee member Jen Jackson believes this project would be eligible for community development grants and such pet supply stores as PetSmart might be willing to make donations. There also is the possibility of Northfield Dog Park t-shirt sales, organized dog walk fundraisers, and (with Select Board permission) a GoFundMe website to solicit donations. The local schools also could get involved with the election of a "Dog Mayor."

Board member Goodrich is very grateful for all the work Friends of Northfield Dog Park have done to date and the public outreach efforts. She did ask about how the location of the dog park would affect the neighborhood. Has there been any outreach on this? Mr. Rhoades said he contacted the owner of the apartment building at the Water Street/Union Street intersection and he was very supportive. The property owner did note that some of his tenants do park on the part of this parcel adjacent to the building but this area would not be used for the dog park. Mr. Rhoades is continuing to contact others who live in the neighborhood. Board member Goodrich then asked who would be expected to enforce park rules. Mr. Rhoades said the posted rules at the Waterbury dog park originally were enforced by the founding committee but as time went on park users themselves formed a maintenance committee. Mr. Rhoades believes people will follow the rules due to peer pressure, etc. and problems would work themselves out over time. Ms. Jackson noted all complaints would go first through the committee.

Board member Goodrich noted the municipality had an underground stormwater treatment facility installed at this site and asked if this would be a problem. Manager Schulz said it would not as the treatment facility was designed to withstand the weight of vehicles, etc. The only possible restrictions might be on the installation of permanent structures but nothing should preclude having a dog park as proposed. He would have to research whether installed benches, etc. would be permissible. Board members Miller and Stevens were supportive of this proposal and would like it to go forward. Board member Morse is a dog owner himself so he sees real benefits to the community in having a downtown location where dogs could co-mingle and run free in a controlled environment. One concern he has is whether some mechanism could be put in place to prevent the spread of disease, ticks, etc. from one infected animal to others. He would like some answers about this before giving his own support for moving forward. Mr. Rhoades said he could contact his own veterinarian to discover how the Waterbury and other dog parks have dealt with this issue. Given the popularity of dog parks, there must be some kind of standard practice that deals with this concern. Mr. Rhoades suggested one requirement might be a local dog license, which requires proof of rabies vaccination. It might be possible to ask for other documentation from first-time users. Deb Zuaro suggested issuing special tags for member dogs so their health history, past interactions with other canines, etc. can be tracked.

Chair Maxwell asked about the timeline for this project. Mr. Rhoades would like the dog park in operation as soon as possible but since NU students would be asked to help with the project, the design phase would not be able to start until NU's fall semester. One benefit of this delay is to allow for additional fundraising and public outreach in coming months. Mr. Rhoades envisions the Northfield Dog Park opening in summer 2022. Chair Maxwell asked how dog fights could be avoided. Mr. Rhoades said any aggressive dogs would be removed from the park and, if the problem persists, would be banned from the facility. He added there are plans to fence off a separate section so smaller dogs can run with their owners. Mr. Rhoades said the dogs would have to be under control at all times with their leashes kept nearby. Chair Maxwell asked if the municipality's current liability insurance would cover a local dog park. Manager Schulz has contacted our insurance provider (VLCT) about this and was told it would. This coverage would not result in a rate increase unless an incident resulted in a successful lawsuit against the municipality. VLCT said it hasn't seen this occur in any of the current dog parks in Vermont. VLCT would like to have one of its risk management assessors to inspect the facility before it opens to ensure there is proper signage, strong bylaws in place, etc.

Chair Maxwell asked if having the dogs run free would violate our local leash law. Manager Schulz did not think so since this would be an enclosed area and the dogs' owners would be expected to keep them under control. Nigel Tibbles worked for a Colorado county park department and felt proper maintenance of the facility, including prompt removal of animal waste from the site, would be vital to its long-term success. Chair Maxwell felt there seems to be Select Board consensus that this would be a good project to pursue provided remaining questions about possible disease spread, neighborhood feeling, etc. are answered. This matter will be on a future agenda and hopefully Mr. Rhoades will have done his research and be able to resolve these concerns.

- c. **Bonnie Donahue and Simon Pearish, Dog River Park Committee: River Buffer and Knotweed Maintenance Agreement.** Mr. Pearish said knotweed is an invasive plant that has infested the riverbank in the vicinity of the Dog River Park. The Friends of the Winooski River is working with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department on a proposed program to use the herbicide Rodeo® to eradicate knotweed in this section of the Dog River. However, this project would first require the Select Board members to approve a ten-year landowner agreement with the Friends of the Winooski River. The work could be done this summer if the agreement is reached soon. Mr. Pearish said the Dog River Park Committee recommends this action. There had been some concerns about the length of the agreement but the terms of it largely parallels the agreement the municipality made with FEMA when the park was first developed. Ms. Donahue said knotweed is very invasive and can soon take over from native flora if left untreated. Use of the herbicide requires a licensed professional and this is what the Friends of the Winooski River will provide free of charge once the agreement has been made. Manager Schulz said the municipality had knotweed removed from the site a couple years ago for about \$1,000. Therefore, the municipality doesn't really need permission to remove knotweed provided a licensed professional is used. Ms. Donahue said the difference is that the future work would be done at no expense to the municipality.

Board member Stevens asked about how the use of this particular herbicide would affect the river. Mr. Pearish said Rodeo® is specifically designed to be used along riverbanks and in floodplains. Board member Morse noted the agreement itself was not included in the Select Board packet and he would like to see the actual wording before proceeding. He felt Friends of the Winooski River has performed many successful projects in Northfield so he has no real reservations. Manager Schulz will forward the agreement to the Select Board members. He still has concerns about the length of the agreement as he doesn't see comparative benefits in giving up control for so long. Manager Schulz also wondered if this project envisioned complete removal of knotweed in the area or annual maintenance work. Mr. Pearish said knotweed cannot be completely eradicated as it will return in some form at a future time. He noted the riverbank opposite from Dog River park also is covered with knotweed. Ms. Donahue agreed this would be an ongoing concern like mowing one's lawn or taking out the trash. Chair Maxwell said this matter will be put on a future agenda once the agreement itself has been distributed to the Select Board members.

- d. **Bonnie Donahue and Lydia Petty, Northfield Common Connections: Downtown Improvement Grant.** Ms. Petty said Northfield recently received a \$18,000 Better Places Grant that is to be used to improve the area on and round the Common. This might include improved lighting; additional chairs and tables for outside dining; art projects; etc. The intention is to enhance this public space while following COVID-19 safety protocols. The art project probably will be hand-painted banners that would exemplify the Northfield living experience. They plan to work with Northfield High School students to provide the bulk of them but community members can submit their contributions. Ms. Petty said there has been public outreach to gain suggestions on how to expend these funds and there have been over two hundred (200) responses. Most of them indicate appreciation for this open space in the heart of the downtown, seeing it as the center of the community. Ms. Donahue said based on these suggestions, she and Ms. Petty are recommending the purchase of moveable bistro tables (4) and chairs (10). These will be light-weight, easily movable around the Common, and people would be encouraged to use them when consuming food purchased from nearby restaurants.

They also are looking to purchase two (2) benches that would match those purchased earlier with a previous grant award. If the benches are sited on a grassy area, a small concrete square would have to be put down next to them to make the benches ADA-compliant. As for the remaining funds, Ms. Petty and Ms. Donahue have looked at two (2) options for which they would appreciate Select Board feedback. One possibility is to purchase one or two (1-2) small tables that have a gameboard (chess or checkers) built into the tabletop. Users would be expected to provide their own game pieces. The other option is purchasing custom, low-impact multi-generational see-saws that would allow interacting play that also provides proper COVID-19 social distancing.

Board member Goodrich likes most of the suggestions tonight but would not like the Common turned into another playground as some residents enjoy its peaceful, relaxing nature. She then asked where the hand-painted banners would be located. Ms. Petty is unsure as the lamp posts located around the Common don't seem suitable. It is possible the banners would be displayed in storefront windows prior to permanent installation. Board members Miller and Stevens were pleased with the suggestions and both preferred the game tables over the seesaws. Board member Stevens asked if the bistro tables and chairs would be stored inside overnight or left outside. Ms. Donahue said they would be left outside. The table/chair manufacturer said overnight theft is a rare occurrence. In any case, the tables and chairs are relatively inexpensive so this might become an experiment in local scrupulousness. Ms. Petty said such setups are used in large cities around the world and theft has not become a major issue. Board member Morse helps run the Northfield Farmers Market on the Common and he has seen severe wind gusts that might cause the lightweight tables and chairs to become airborne and perhaps land in the street. He likes that there would be ADA-compliance measures taken for the new benches. He would like to see any new picnic tables installed on the Common to be accessible to those in wheelchairs, those using walkers, etc. He then thanked Ms. Petty and Ms. Donahue for all their good work.

Chair Maxwell noted the municipality purchased and installed more picnic tables on the Common last year after public requests. They have been used regularly and he asked if the new purchases would complement or replace them. Ms. Petty said the new items would be in addition. She noted the current picnic tables aren't accessible to all and the new items will allow for more versatility. Chair Maxwell then asked about the suggestion to improve the lighting on the Common. Ms. Donahue said they are still looking at options as permanent lighting installations can be very expensive. It might be possible to reconfigure the current light fixtures to direct more light towards the Common. Another possibility is to install directed lighting in the trees. Temporary lighting for special events is another option. Cassie Morse manages the Northfield Farmers Market and she said they had to install temporary lighting during their special nighttime events such as "Night on the Common" and the Winter Farmers Market. Otherwise, vendors wouldn't be able to properly conduct transactions. Chair Maxwell said it appears improved lighting is a work in progress. Ms. Donahue confirmed this and said they have been working with Manager Schulz to find a cost-effective solution. After stating his personal preference for the game tables, Chair Maxwell said it appears to be Select Board consensus that Ms. Petty and Ms. Donahue proceed with this project providing they continue to work with Manager Schulz on the logistics. He then thanked them both for their efforts.

IV. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

- a. Liquor License Renewal: Good Measure Brewing Co.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Outside Consumption Permit: Good Measure Brewing Co.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve the outside consumption permit. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **April 13, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the minutes. Board member Morse requested a couple revisions. **Motion to approve the amended minutes passed 5-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #20-21.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to approve Warrant #20-21 in the amount of \$131,838.59. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through April 18, 2021.** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$102,740.99. Board member Stevens noticed a steep increase in Northfield Police Department (NPD) overtime expense over the previous payroll period (from \$2,118.03 to \$4,204.22) and asked why this happened. Manager Schulz said that the NPD has been dealing for several months with two (2) full-time officers serving in the military and recently had another full-time officer on work-related disability. He believes these factors finally caught up with the NPD and resulted in the increased overtime expense this time. He noted the injured officer should be back to work within a couple weeks. Chair Maxwell noted that NPD overtime expenses have been relatively under control this fiscal year compared to past years. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Recreation Committee.** Chair Maxwell said at the previous meeting (04/13/21) there had been an attempt to dissolve the Recreation Committee that did not pass due to several abstentions. It might be time to revisit this matter. He, Board member Goodrich, and Manager Schulz held a remote meeting yesterday with one of the remaining Recreation Committee members who had several concerns about the current state of the recreation fields, etc. Board member Morse had proposed the dissolution at the previous meeting and he still believes a complete reorganization of the committee would provide definite benefits to the community. He would like to look into the possibility of forming a regional committee that includes representatives from neighboring towns. We also need to look at who is using the recreational fields for organized activities and ask them to help with field maintenance. The field users also could serve as liaisons to Manager Schulz and inform him of what maintenance needs to be done, equipment needed, etc. Board member Morse believes this will lead to much greater efficiency than the current setup so he would like to revive his previous motion. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Miller, to dissolve the current Recreation Committee and appoint field users to an interim committee that would work in conjunction with Manager Schulz. Board member Goodrich agreed that this seems to be the time for change. Board member Miller agreed. Board member Stevens wondered if Manager Schulz would have the time to add the former responsibilities of the Recreation Committee members to his current workload. Manager Schulz agrees this much-needed committee now needs new direction. He believes he will be able to find the time to do what's needed. Chair Maxwell thanked Board member Morse for his work on his proposal. He now agrees that this is the time for change and a new approach. Ms. Petty thought the Northfield Ridge + River Routes members would be willing to help if this meant expanding our concept of local recreation beyond organized sports to include other outdoors activities. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Northfield VT Local Emergency Management Plan.** Manager Schulz said this local plan needs to be updated and submitted annually to Vermont Emergency Management. The plan has contact information for the local emergency response structure as well as denoting emergency operation centers, emergency shelters, etc. Not having a local plan in place might reduce the amount of state and federal disaster relief funding. Chair Maxwell endorses plan approval provided all information is current. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to approve the Local Emergency Management Plan for Northfield, Vermont. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Internal Financial Controls Checklist for Municipalities.** Manager Schulz said this document was prepared by Finance Director Laurie Baroffio for distribution to the Select Board members. This distribution is a prerequisite when applying for funds through the Bond Bank. No further action is needed unless there are any questions.
- b. **Slate Avenue Stormwater Improvements.** Manager Schulz said a letter was sent last week to Slate Avenue property owners informing them that new stormwater lines and basins will be installed along the street in coming weeks. The letter asks for patience while this much-needed work is performed and promises any damage done to driveways, etc. will be repaired afterwards. In addition, the street will be paved this summer after all the stormwater control work has been completed. Mr. Pearish lives on Slate Avenue and he was very grateful for this municipal outreach to the residents.
- c. **South Main Street Sidewalk Project.** Manager Schulz noted that the sidewalk contractor (Josh Fenoff Siteworks) has returned this week to complete this project. Manager Schulz has been assured the rest of the project will stay on track and all work should be completed within the next couple months.
- d. **Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) Sludge Disposal.** Manager Schulz said the municipality has reached an agreement with Englobe Corp USA to transport Northfield WWTF sludge to a Canadian facility where it will be repurposed for resale as compost. The cost of this proposal is similar to the current situation by which our sludge has been transferred to the Barre City WWTF prior to transportation to a Canadian landfill. The agreement is year-to-year.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Brown Public Library (BPL) Renovations.** Board member Stevens also serves as Treasurer on the BPL Board of Trustees. He has received a \$900 quote to stain the treehouse adjacent to the library. As this quote is considered appropriate, the work will proceed as soon as possible.
- b. **Recognition of Municipal Employees.** Chair Maxwell would like to commend Northfield municipal employees for all their good work during these trying times. He noted municipal employees often seem to receive much criticism (warranted or not) but not as much praise as they might deserve.
- c. **Community Civility.** Chair Maxwell believes the level of civility in this community has improved much in recent months. He hopes this will continue and that any concerns or issues that may arise in the future can be resolved in an amicable manner.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a contract negotiation and a personnel matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:34 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 10:46 p.m. No action was taken.

XII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Morse, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 10:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes are subject to approval at the next Select Board regular meeting.